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(Continued on pages 91, 92, and 93)

PLAYS OF INNOCENCE

By GWEN JOHN



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A TALE THAT IS TOLD
A PLAY IN ONE ACT

First presented on October 14th, 1922, at the Montgomery Hall, Sheffield, by the Unnamed Society of Manchester (and subsequently in Manchester) with the following cast:

ERIC NEWTON	<i>Charles Hill.</i>
DOROTHY CROSSE	<i>Mary Ann Hill.</i>
ARTHUR DEAN	<i>Jim Hill.</i>
M. GWEN BAX	<i>Mrs. Beresford.</i>

Setting by PETER BAX. Produced by F. SLADEN SMITH.

SCENE:—*In the Derbyshire village of Sutton Green.
A cottage kitchen. Fireplace, left. Table, centre. Door,
right centre. Dresser, cupboard, etc.*

TIME:—*Evening.*

*Present, CHARLES HILL, MARY ANN HILL (his wife)
and JIM HILL (their son, a boy of ten). Later, a neigh-
bour, MRS. BERESFORD.*

*MARY and CHARLES HILL are looking over a bundle of
clothes and personal belongings.*

MARY ANN HILL: It gives a place such a bad name,
an' all. You mark me, t' Green 'll be known for long
enough as the home o' Clement Preston—him as were
hanged! Them as lives here will be shadowed by t'
crime. It'll be bad for the lads too. (*Turns to JIM, and
changes her lachrymose voice to one of awful authority.*)
You look careful, Jim, and mind you don't come to an
end like poor Clement's!

JIM: I wish you wouldna always be telling me to
look careful when I've done nowt.

MRS. HILL: Happen if you'd done summut it would
be ower late to mention it. Get set into good habits while
you're young, and don't grow up wild.

CHARLES HILL: Dunna be severe on him, moother.
He's a good lad. Wouldsta like to see Mester Preston's
watch, Jimmy?—Here it is. Happen it'll be yourn when
you're grown up.

MRS. HILL: But you mustn't be a bad man like him,
Jim.—I wish you wouldna put ideas into his head,
Charles. It'll be time enough to gi' it him when you gi'
it him. I don't want you to fill his thoughts o' Clement
Preston, or happen he'll make him his example.

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

JIM: How were he a bad man, moother?

MRS. HILL: He went poachin' and kep' bad company, then he got led on. And you know how he ended.

JIM: Ay, he were hung. But that weren't for poachin'.

MRS. HILL: It were one thing led to another.

JIM: I'd like poachin' . . . but I wouldna like to be hung.

MRS. HILL: Then you'd best look out.

JIM: Show me his oother things, moother.

MRS. HILL: That's coat as condemned 'im, Jim. You see it's tore. A part of it were found on a bush in t' plantin',* and then they knew it were him. Let that be a warnin' to you.

JIM: Ay. When he found he'd tore a piece off, he shouldn't ha' kep' t' coat, should he!—Yon's a pretty handkercher.

MRS. HILL: Nay, it's flash. It's a poacher's handkercher all ower, that is. Eh, Charles, I'm thinkin' you'd know the manner o' man he were by his clothes.

CHARLES: He were none such a bad 'un.

MRS. HILL: Nay, but he were one that were cut out for bad company. Take your 'ands out o' them weskit pockets, Jim. You'll be mislayin' summut, and I've not been through them yet.

JIM: There's summut in it.

MRS. HILL: Gi' it 'ere then, and don't you finger it.

[JIM brings out a tiny parcel, wrapped in paper.

* Plantation, wood.

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

MRS. HILL: Gi' it to your father, Jim. It's for him to open everything.

[JIM *hands it over.*]

CHARLES: It's summut soft.

MRS. HILL: That tells me nowt. Unwrap it, father.

[CHARLES *unwraps it. He hesitates.*]

MRS. HILL: What is it?

CHARLES: It's—it's a lock o' hair.

MRS. HILL: Gi' it 'ere. Now whose will that be?

[CHARLES *doesn't answer.*]

MRS. HILL: It curls, doosn't it?—I should throw it in t' fire.

CHARLES: Nay, you munna, not yet.

MRS. HILL: It's no good keepin' it.

CHARLES: I don't want to destroy nothing I can help.

MRS. HILL: Oh, well, if you feel like that!—Happen you know whose it is?

[CHARLES *still is silent.*]

Why, do you think it's Amy's?

CHARLES (*takes it in his hand*): It looks same as hers used to.

MRS. HILL: But he'd never keep hers—after all that's took place.

CHARLES: I don't know. (*He rolls the hair in paper again.*)

MRS. HILL: That woman's summut to answer for. She set him on wrong road.

CHARLES: Nay, you've no right to say that.

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

MRS. HILL: I've my own observations. I've noticed a good few times that if a man goes down hill same as him, there's a woman at back of it. Every man's what some woman makes him.

CHARLES: Then you'd best look after Jim and John Henry, while they're in your control!

MRS. HILL: I shall do my best, trust me. If they go wrong it wayn't be their mother's fault.

CHARLES: But you'll give blame to some other woman! It ought to ha' been Eve, not Adam, what said as the woman begun it.

MRS. HILL: The only proof again' it was that there weren't another on 'em—or no doubt she'd have been a hussy like the rest and made eyes at Adam—I know 'em.

CHARLES (*smiling*): Well, there wouldna ha' been none else for her to make eyes at, poor lass.

MRS. HILL: I knew as you'd take her part!

[*There is a knock at the door. MRS. HILL turns towards it. JIMMY opens it.*]

MRS. HILL: Coom in. Why, it's Mrs. Beresford. (*This is not surprise, but a form of greeting.*)

[*MRS. BERESFORD enters.*]

CHARLES: You've just coom i' time to stop t' missus and me fro' pickin' a quarrel over a young woman what never lived.

MRS. BERESFORD: You mun be wantin' something to quarrel for, the two on you.—Have you seen t' newspaper?

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

CHARLES: Nay, not yet. It weren't out when I come home. Is there owt in it? (*He seats himself by the fire. The two women sit nearer the table.*)

MRS. BERESFORD: Ay: there's a full áccount. They've made an end o' poor Clement at last. It's all ower.

MRS. HILL: Eh, it's awful. I were sayin' to t' mester, it's a bad job for t' lot on us. A bad job for Sutton Green.

MRS. BERESFORD: Ay: they might ha' let him off wi' painal servitude, for it's bad to say you coom fro' the same place as a gallows-bird. And he mun ha' been drunk, and happen that's some excuse.

MRS. HILL: They mostly is drunk when they does them things. Yet, if 'e's done it—— Still it's a cruel end to come to.—I fancy 'im waitin' and watchin' for re-prieve, and it never comin'! You can't believe as them you've known year in, year out, can ha' done such a thing. It's like these 'ere movin' pictures.

MRS. BERESFORD: Such things happens often enough in life though, judging by t' newspapers. And there'll be someone as knows all these here criminals.

MRS. HILL: I canna look on Clement as a ordinary criminal. As nice-spoken a man as ever walked, he were, until he went wrong road. Doos it say—doos it say how he died?

MRS. BERESFORD: Ay; it says as he were cóposed. (*Wipes her eyes.*)

MRS. HILL: Poor Clement!—And he were once a promising young man—till Ted Preston put in his oar—and Amy jilted him for Ted.

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

MRS. BERESFORD: What sort o' fellow were Ted? I never knew much o' that one.

MRS. HILL: I know nowt again' him—I always blamed Amy mysen.

[CHARLES *stirs irritably.*

He were a quiet young man seemingly.

MRS. BERESFORD: It's no wonder they left these parts after the trial, such talkin' as there was!—I saw Ted wi' Amy i' t' roadway not so long before they took Clement. Through the kitchen window it were, and so happy they looked together. (*In an undertone.*)—Was your mester ever out o' nights—i' t' covers—wi' them?

MRS. HILL: Nay, not i' my time! How can yer think such a thing? He's no poacher!

CHARLES: There's many a thing we does i' youth, Mrs. Beresford. And somehow we canna be as hard on usselves about them as us missises would be.

[JIMMY *stares.*

MRS. HILL: Sh. Poor Clement left his bits o' things to Charles. They were about of a size, but I don't know as I fancy him wearin' them; they mightn't bring him luck. (*Lowering her voice.*) And we've got his coat too—t' coat as condemned 'im. You weren't i' court the day I were witness, were you?

MRS. BERESFORD: Nay, I couldna get near. T' crowd stood as long as fro' 'ere to t' church. I'd like to have heard you.

MRS. HILL: Ay: I gave evidence a quarter of an hour!

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

CHARLES: She kep' on saying, "He were as decent a man as ever I've known. He wouldn't ha' hurt a fly. I've known him most o' my life." That isna evidence. (*He fills his pipe.*)

MRS. HILL (*indignantly*): If it isn't I'd like to know what is!

CHARLES: It's only evidence what you've seen yourself, and its bearing on the charge again' prisoner.

MRS. HILL: I should think the manner o' man he were had a bearing on t' charge!

MRS. BERESFORD (*wistfully*): I wish they'd ha' called me.

CHARLES: Did you know summut?

MRS. BERESFORD: Nay; but I've never witnessed again' anyone.

CHARLES: Missis and me weren't tryin' for to injure 'im!

MRS. BERESFORD: I didn't mean it i' that sense. I'd have done my best help Clement, of course.

CHARLES: That's what t' missis tried, i'stead of statin' facts—and then when she told them things as she'd seen they wouldn't believe 'er.

MRS. BERESFORD (*eagerly*): Had you seen owt?

MRS. HILL: I'd seen *him* day o' murder!

MRS. BERESFORD: And did he look excited?

MRS. HILL: Nay, it were earlier. He looked a bit absent i' mind, but then he often did that.

MRS. BERESFORD (*nodding her head darkly*): Happen he were on t' way to t' crime!

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

MRS. HILL: He couldn't ha' been on t' way. He were dressed different, I were sure. But they questioned me as to my memory till I didn't know whether I were on my head or heels.

CHARLES: They were seein' if he could plead a alibi, happen; but he didna try.

MRS. HILL: It's so hard to make sure which way they mean to use what you say.

MRS. BERESFORD: Ay, it is that. They take pleasure in confoundin' your wits.

CHARLES: They study to do it. That's a lawyer's trade.

MRS. BERESFORD (*looking towards table*): Wayn't it be painful lookin' through all his bits o' treasures, missis?

MRS. HILL: Ay, it is that. There's his silver watch, an' all.

MRS. BERESFORD: Mester Hill and him must ha' been great friends, an' all.

MRS. HILL: They was, many years ago. But Charles were always more quiet-like.

CHARLES: I had to be, missis, once I'd met you!

MRS. BERESFORD: It's a pity poor Clement Preston didn't find such another, I say. Happen he'd be alive to-day.

CHARLES: I don't know so much. Poachin's bred in the bone with them Prestons.

MRS. BERESFORD: Wi' Ted, too?

CHARLES: I wanna take away his good name. I don't know for sure, now. He's older than what he were. (*He looks into the fire meditatively.*)

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

MRS. BERESFORD: Happen his wife 'll keep him straight.

MRS. HILL (*scornfully*): I think Amy'd do best look to t' gait she goes hersen.

MRS. BERESFORD (*full of interest*): Dunna you like Amy?

MRS. HILL: I never could abide her. I always thought her a sly one.

MRS. BERESFORD: You couldn't abide her?

MRS. HILL: It doesn't matter sayin' it now she's gone to Canady. (*Deeply.*) I'm sorry for Ted.

MRS. BERESFORD: Eh, and I thought you was fond of her!—I liked her mysen, little though I knew o' her.

MRS. HILL (*under her breath*): Ay, but happen she'd never set her cap at your mester!

CHARLES (*turning round*): Mary Ann, you wunna believe me, chance what I tell you; but you're mad to speak so! (*He makes a gesture of repudiation, and tries to settle to doze.*)

MRS. HILL: I didn't think he'd hear that. Trust a sleepin' dog never to miss his own name!

CHARLES: You knew as I wasna sleepin'!

MRS. BERESFORD (*softly*): Was she forrud——?

MRS. HILL: Ay, and it flattered 'im. You know what men are.

MRS. BERESFORD (*with a nod*): Ay.

MRS. HILL: He may thank his stars as he'd me to look after him.—Why, she did for poor Clement!

MRS. BERESFORD: It were before I comed here—but I've heard some on it.

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

MRS. HILL: She threw him ower, after banns were up—and took up wi' Ted instead!

MRS. BERESFORD: And Clement never got over it?

MRS. HILL: I doubt me he never courted none but Amy in his life. It embittered him.

MRS. BERESFORD: Poor Clement, poor Clement!
(*Rocks herself to the words.*)

MRS. HILL: Ay; and happen poor Ted, who knows?—For a fly-away like that's not much good to anyone.

CHARLES (*bringing his fist down with a bang and rising*): Amy Anstell were no fly-away!

MRS. HILL: I wish if you're sleepy, you'd sleep! Can't me and Mrs. Beresford talk with one another without you wantin' to arrange what it's all about?—She left Clement i' the lurch, and off she flew wi' Ted. What do you make o' that?

CHARLES (*his temper aroused*): And I'd have flown off wi' her at one time o' day—yet I didna. And then I wedded you. She's changed no oftener than most on us.
(*He has joined the group, and stands by the table.*)

MRS. HILL: Ay, but you most on you steadied for t' better.

CHARLES: Ay. We had to. She didn't want none but Ted. (*He turns away.*)

MRS. BERESFORD (*ruminatively*): It's strange Clement should ha' kep' single for her sake.

CHARLES: It's none so strange. There were that about her—— Oh, well—Clement were that sort. He were faithful—and slow to alter.

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

MRS. BERESFORD: And there's no constancy i' t' world like that o' a man for a woman who's not married 'im.

MRS. HILL: It seems like a life thrown away, doos Clement's.

CHARLES: Ay. (*Soberly.*) And yet t' keeper who were killed that night i' t' wood—his were a life ended too. He were doing his duty, and he were a man wi' a wife and children. Them as breaks the law mun take t' risk—and justice mun be done.

MRS. BERESFORD: Do you think as how he killed him o' purpose, Mester Hill?

CHARLES: Nay, I never do. He were a merciful man. Many's the time I've heard him say to a child, "Don't hurt the dumb things; if it's only a worm, it's living, and it's as good a right to live as you have."

MRS. BERESFORD: Then how could he ha' done it?

CHARLES: I doubt he mun ha' had summut to drink. He did, now and again.

MRS. HILL: And it were Amy drove him to that!

CHARLES: You can't bring it all home to her, Mary, or there'd be no end to any of us sins!

MRS. HILL: Happen there isn't.

MRS. BERESFORD: They oughtn't to ha' hanged Clement if he did it unknowingly.

CHARLES: They didn't seem to think it were that. They went again' him. They thought him défiant. You've got to trust t' jury.

MRS. BERESFORD: Was you in court all t' time?

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

CHARLES: Ay.

MRS. HILL (*proudly*): Mester went to see Clement i' t' lock-up, too——

MRS. BERESFORD: To think o' that!—I don't know how he durst.

CHARLES: It's little to do for one as you'll never see again.

MRS. BERESFORD: Did he seem broke up?

CHARLES: Nay. He seemed just calm.

MRS. HILL: I don't see mysen how he can ha' done it, i' that case. It's unnatural.

CHARLES: I dunna know.—I think we could all of us do most things if we was worked up.—And they say as the law makes no mistakes;—believes yer innocent till it knows you're guilty. But I dunna know.

MRS. BERESFORD: Didn't he want to live? Wasn't he cut up about hisself?

CHARLES: He told me as he'd rather he died. He told me to tell Ted not to trouble. And not to drink like him. And to remember Amy. And always to take care o' Amy.

MRS. HILL: There's been too much thought o' Amy!

MRS. BERESFORD: He mun ha' loved Amy.

MRS. HILL: Love thrown away on such as her!

CHARLES: He'd the right to throw it away if he chose.

MRS. BERESFORD: Yet his life were just waste. And him hanged now, and she traipsin' off to Canady!—Dear, dear.

CHARLES: I wish I could ha' given Ted that message, but he'd gone. (*Doubtfully.*) I suppose it were natural he wouldn't stay here.

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

MRS. BERESFORD: Did Clement say owt else you can tell us?

CHARLES: Only that I were to have his belongings—being in prison he couldn't well deal with them himself. And I were never to let Ted see them. Happen he thought he'd grudge them.

MRS. BERESFORD: I'd like to see his things.

[CHARLES *returns to the table.*]

MRS. HILL: Ay, it's summut to see the clothes o' a man who were hanged, in spite o' all.

MRS. BERESFORD: Ay, it's historical. My grandad used to tell me as he'd once seen a man hanged i' public. He were made a rare lot of on that account. A fine memory he had. Why, wayn't they think a lot i' days to come o' children that remembers t' war!—And here i' t' Green it'll be: "Do you remember Clement Preston—him as were hanged for killing gamekeeper i' Norman-ton Spring?—What manner o' man were he?"

CHARLES (*who has been standing by thoughtfully*): Even us as knew him living canna tell that. He were the secretest man when he'd a mind that ever I come by.

MRS. HILL: Ay, there mun ha' been a black streak in him always, little though we knew it, for him to ha' come to this; though I wouldn't ha' said it i' court!

CHARLES (*cogitating*): I wonder *were* there.

MRS. BERESFORD: Ay, there mun ha' been. You don't come to t' gallows for nowt.

MRS. HILL: It were that streak, happen, drew him to Amy.

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

[CHARLES looks at her as if to speak; then looks down, puffing at his pipe. After a pause.]

CHARLES: To my mind there mun ha' been summut that never came out in court o' law. It's not that there weren't motive for the crime——

MRS. HILL: I suppose it were motive enough that t' keeper caught him.

CHARLES: Ay. But it were his attitude afterwards that puzzled me. It angered judge. It puzzles me yet. For Clement were a kind man.

MRS. BERESFORD: What war it like?

CHARLES: He were seemingly that light-hearted. That wasna natural, not wi' another man's death on his hands: that were not like Clement.

MRS. HILL: Nay, it's all a mystery!

MRS. BERESFORD: He were happen changed since days when you knew him better. He were grown callous.

CHARLES (*emphatically*): He were not, Mrs. Beresford.

MRS. HILL: It's no good you arguin' wi' him. Charles always will stand up for Clement.

CHARLES: I don't like to hear no-one miscalled. There's enough to bear wi'out inventions. And gossip'll blow you any direction like a weather-cock.

MRS. HILL: No one's invented as Clement's got himself hanged!

CHARLES: Nay, I wish as how they had! That's the only truth I can put my finger on.

MRS. BERESFORD: Show us his bits o' things, mester. We didna mean to mis-call 'im. Whatever 'e's done, 'e's dead.

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

MRS. HILL: Ay: we munna bear him ill-will now.

MRS. BERESFORD: He's paid his price, poor chap.

[CHARLES *passes the neckerchief.*

Is that his scarf, mester? Eh, it's a beauty! (*Beginning to cry.*) It brings it 'ome to you when you see his bits o' finery.

MRS. HILL: Ay, it does that. (*Drying her own eyes.*) And him there i' Derby Gaol—hanged. And not a soul to care.

CHARLES: That were what he said when I saw him last. He said, "It doesn't matter that much!" (*Snapping his fingers.*) "No one'll cry."

MRS. BERESFORD (*indignantly*): He were wrong i' that!

CHARLES: I doubt he wouldna ha' thought the tears o' no-one here counted.

MRS. HILL (*more cheerfully*): No; for when all's said and done we're not going to break our hearts over him.

CHARLES: There's some women cries for pleasure, I do believe.

MRS. HILL: If we do it only means as we're cryin' for someone else instead of for ourselves—and that's nowt to despise us for!

CHARLES: No; it's nowt to despise you for, but it doesn't alter case. There's no-one who cares—as true carin' goes—for Clement.

MRS. HILL (*to MRS. BERESFORD*): Not same as if you or me lost us mester perhaps.

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

MRS. BERESFORD: Ay, you're i' right o' that. He were a lonely man.

MRS. HILL: All men is as isn't wedded. (*Returning to the bundle.*) We was just looking at this when you came in, missis. That's his watch.

MRS. BERESFORD: It's a nice one, that is. Doos it go?

MRS. HILL: Ay. And see here. This is t' green cord* coat as hanged him.

MRS. BERESFORD (*pauses—then in horror*): That!

MRS. HILL: Ay—Why?

CHARLES: It were an old one o' his fayther's. Ted wanted it, but Clement kep' it because he were elder.

MRS. HILL: It's cut that old-fashioned.—Why, whatever is the matter, Mrs. Beresford? Are you took bad?

MRS. BERESFORD (*panting*): I've seen yon coat afore!

MRS. HILL: Happen. He wore it now and again.

MRS. BERESFORD: But—I've seen Ted in that!

MRS. HILL: Nay, I shouldn't think it likely, though he might ha' borrowed it.

MRS. BERESFORD: I have. He had it on that day!

MRS. HILL: What day were that?

MRS. BERESFORD: Day o' t' murder, Mrs. Hill!

MRS. HILL: Day o'——?

MRS. BERESFORD: T' day on night o' which keeper were killed.

MRS. HILL (*in consternation, as she grasps the purport of this statement*): Missis!!!

* Corduroy.

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

CHARLES (*sternly*): Go on wi' what you saw.

MRS. HILL (*interrupting*): But then why didn't Clement deny as he ever had it on that day?

MRS. BERESFORD: Seems like as he must ha' forgotten.

CHARLES (*fixing her attention*): Are you sure as you're right, Missis Beresford?

MRS. BERESFORD: As sure as I sit here. Why, it's only time I've ever seen it, and it were on Ted that day!

CHARLES: You could swear to it?—There's a lot depended on that coat.

MRS. BERESFORD: Nay, I said it were through t' kitchen windy: it were through glass!

[There is a superstitious or religious prejudice in Derbyshire against swearing to the truth of anything seen through glass. Witnesses have been known to refuse to give evidence as to incidents so seen.]

But I'm as sure of it as that I'm sitting here.

CHARLES: Happen it isn't evidence, through glass—so you couldn't ha' saved Clement anyhow. But I believe yer!

MRS. HILL: What are you goin' to do about it?

CHARLES: What can I do?—Nowt.—It's too late. He's hung.

MRS. HILL: Think you as he kep' his mouth shut o' purpose.

CHARLES: Ay. He mun ha' done it i' cold blood, knowingly.

MRS. HILL: Then he mun ha' done it to save Ted!

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

MRS. BERESFORD: He'd no call to love Ted. And it'd be suicide, wouldn't it?

CHARLES: I don't know what it 'ud be. I'm sure he done it.

MRS. BERESFORD: You think as he gave up his life when he could have escaped?

CHARLES: Ay.—And happen it were for somebody else's sake, too.

MRS. HILL (*eyes the others as if dazed, then turns her face away and bursts into sobs*): I'll never say nowt against nobody no more. (*Sobs bitterly.*)

CHARLES (*after a long pause, during which he tries to speak and fails*): Yes, you will, Mary Ann. We all shall after a short while. It doesna take long to forget. I were worse than you, for I were his friend, and I weren't sure.

MRS. HILL (*sobbing*): You were a true friend—for you believed in 'im though you didn't know.

CHARLES: Thank yer, Mary Ann; but it isna quite the fact.

MRS. HILL: You were the only friend 'e's 'ad.

CHARLES: It's a pity I weren't a bit sharper-witted. If I'd been quicker I'd have saved Clement.

MRS. HILL: He didn't save himself and he could ha' done

CHARLES: He wouldna.

MRS. BERESFORD: If he'd fling away his life like that he mun ha' been a most unhappy man.

CHARLES: It were his life or Ted's, you see.

MRS. BERESFORD (*hotly*): If Ted would let him do a thing like that he oughter be hanged!

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

MRS. HILL: Wayn't they fetch Ted back now, Charles?

CHARLES: Nay, Mary, the law's the law, and they can't hang another man now. They found Clement guilty. It's only us who knows better.

MRS. BERESFORD: But where's justice if Ted goes free?

CHARLES: Where's justice to Clement if what he's done doesn't stand as he meant it?

MRS. HILL: Where's justice, anyway?

CHARLES: I wonder. Not i' this vale o' woe!

MRS. BERESFORD: It doesn't seem right to me, to leave things as they are.

CHARLES: Ted's conscience wayn't let him off.

MRS. BERESFORD: That's some comfort.

CHARLES: Not to me, missis.

MRS. HILL: Nor Amy's won't neither, I hope, for she's been the ruin o' the two o' them.

CHARLES: They've happen thought it worth it. . . . And after all, we're fancyin' a lot o' this 'ere. What knowledge have we?

MRS. BERESFORD: I've my memory o' that day.

CHARLES: Memories is tricky things.

MRS. HILL: And yet us three's as certain that Clement went i' place o' Ted as that we are sitting here.

CHARLES: Ay: but us certainty's not law nor proof.

[*A pause.*]

MRS. HILL (*hysterically*): I canna bear thoughts o' that coat; it oughter go into a museum.

CHARLES: I shall make away wi' it.

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

MRS. BERESFORD: Make away wi' a good coat!—you might sell it, mester.

CHARLES: I shall do as I said—i' case.

MRS. BERESFORD: I' case what?

CHARLES: I' case someone else saw Ted in it that day.

MRS. HILL: I don't know why you should make it your business to keep guard over Ted, Charles.

CHARLES: It were Clement's wish. I couldn't rest i' my bed o' nights if I knew I'd frustrated 'im in owt he set such store by. It's little to do to cover up traces. And it's left wi' me to do it. He couldna do it himself—not i' gaol.

MRS. HILL: What'll you do?

[CHARLES *takes the coat from the table, carries it to the fireplace, flings it on the fire.*]

CHARLES (*poking the coat down into the blaze*): That's what I'll do!

MRS. BERESFORD: It's a sin. I think you ought to ha' kep' it to clear his memory from réproach.

CHARLES: Little he'd ha' cared about his memory!

MRS. BERESFORD: Well, when I die I hope I'll leave someone as willing to follow up my wishes.

CHARLES (*drily*): I think it'll depend on yourself.

MRS. BERESFORD: Yet Clement were not a man as you'd make a model of!

CHARLES: Why not, missis?—I doubt me we'll ne'er do owt to come anear him in this.

MRS. HILL: You're i' the right o' that. It fair takes away your breath to think what he's a-done!

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

CHARLES: And we none o' us with sense enough to guess at such a reason. It's little we know o' any man's secret thoughts till they're shown to us by chance, as it were. And we canna let him know as we know it now.

MRS. HILL: It mun be punishment for Ted wi' coals o' fire, as they say.

CHARLES: Ay: it's more'n I'd care to bear.

MRS. BERESFORD (*rather maliciously*): Then you're glad you're not i' Ted's shoes, Mester Hill?

CHARLES: I'm best content to be where I am.

[*There is a slight pause.*]

JIM (*who has listened*): Moother—need I wait for Mester Preston's watch now as he's done nowt?

MRS. HILL: Nay, if you're a good lad you can wear it o' Sundays.—Not every day, for happen you'd break it—and you mun keep it i' honour of Clement.

MRS. BERESFORD: Have you a bit o' a scarf, or owt you could spare, for me to keep i' honour of him too?

MRS. HILL: She could have yon scarf, couldn't she, mester?

[CHARLES *nods*.]

MRS. BERESFORD: I'd like to keep summut o' a man who were hanged innocent. And I must be going, missis, and thank you, the two on you, for a pleasant hour. My old man'll be home fro' vestry-meetin' before me if I don't hurry mysen.

MRS. HILL: Good night, missis. Eh, but I canna take my mind off poor Clement sitting i' gaol wondering would no one guess as he were wronged!—There has been awful doin's.

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

CHARLES: Good night, missis.

[MRS. BERESFORD goes.]

We're shut on her at last—and t' world's shut on Clement. We mun try to forget him, and forget this day. All's over, and broodin' won't mend matters. What say you, Mary Ann?

MRS. HILL: Nay, we mun remember him. It's only recompense we can make.

CHARLES: It wayn't do him no good. He's nowt to us now but a memory. And nobody cares but us. Let us put away the belongin's that was his: he's over for us all as if he hadna begun.

MRS. HILL: Nay, he's not!

CHARLES: What do yer mean?

MRS. HILL: He's not over, nor like to be, for many a long year—not wi' Hannah Beresford's tongue to keep him goin'.

CHARLES: Then i' his place I'd rather be forgot!

MRS. HILL: I wouldna.—It's summut to be only mentioned i' passing.—“Ay,” folks'll say; “that's t' Green, where Clement Preston lived.” Or, “That puts me i' mind o' year when Clement Preston died—nay—didna dic—were hanged, he were, for summut another'd done. (*In a dramatic whisper.*) Nay—you munna say it loud!—Happen you'll have heard t' story?” (*As she helps to fold the clothes back again into the bundle she finds the lock of hair again, in its paper wrapping. She takes it in her hands.*) What shall you do wi' this? It's been nowt but a curse.

A TALE THAT IS TOLD

CHARLES: Gi' it here. (*He takes it and unwraps the lock.*) Is it a curse or a blessing I wonder?—I doubt it may be both. It were for this Clement died. (*He crosses to the fire, and drops it in.*) Ashes to ashes, Amy.—There's been stranger ways of grace.

[*The fire flares up and consumes the hair.—Then the curtain falls.*]

ON THE ROAD

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

*First produced at the Forum Club, May 2nd, 1920,
with the following cast :*

FORRESTER HARVEY	<i>The Workman.</i>
GWEN JOHN	<i>The Woman.</i>
J. MOFFAT JOHNSTON	<i>The Tramp.</i>
DOROTHY SECKER	<i>The Child.</i>

SCENE:—*In Sheffield. A workman's coffee-house, small and stuffy. Tin urns of tea, coffee, and cocoa on the counter up left and oilcloth-covered tables down stage. There is a thick, black fog outside. It is a winter afternoon, and the lamp is lighted—beyond its rays the room is in shadow. It is insufficiently warmed by a stove. The urns diffuse dampness.*

Up right is the street door, and behind the counter a door communicates with the house. The air is pervaded by a curious smell of steam and tin—rather like the smell of a lead pencil. The whole place is bare and cheerless.*

At the table, right, a WORKMAN sits in his shirt-sleeves, eating and drinking. The WOMAN behind the counter is haggard and overworked, and anxious and unlovely. She is patching a worn-out garment.

WORKMAN (*pausing between mouthfuls*): How's t' little lass this evening, missis?

WOMAN: She's better nor what she were, mester, I thank you. But I doubt me. . . . (*She pauses and sniffs a little.*)

WORKMAN: You mun look on t' bright side, missis.

WOMAN: I doubt me she's a little bit cónsumptive.

WORKMAN: She'll happen grow out o' it. Our Lizzie were such a one at her age; and now you'd not know she were t' same wench. But I thowt I'd not seen her about i' t' shop lately. You should bring her in, it 'ud be a change for her, and nice and warm.

* This is not a stage direction.

ON THE ROAD

WOMAN: T' doctor said it were too warm, I were killing her. So when she's in fro' school I give her her tea i' t' back-room. It's damp too. He said I ought to take her out o' t' town and out o' smoke. But I canna do that. I couldna earn a living elsewhere.

WORKMAN: Couldn't you send her happen to t' country—on a visit, as it were?

WOMAN: Nay, I've nowhere I could send her.

WORKMAN: There were a children's home our Lizzie went to.

WOMAN (*resentfully and violently*): I wunna be parted from her. It 'ud kill her to leave her mother. I won't send her to none o' they Bastilles.

WORKMAN: Nay, this were a kind o' hospital.

WOMAN: I won't send my Rose Lily to no hospital. —There were that lad o' Holmes's—they sent him; and they cut him up and cut him up—till he died, poor lad. They'll not do none o' their practisin' on Rosie. . . . Will you help yoursen, mester? And call me if anyone comes in—and I'll just go and see if happen she wants more tea. (*She goes.*)

WORKMAN: Ay, I'll mind t' shop; nobody's likely to come in a day like this. (*Finishes his tea, fills his pipe, lights it and looks out his coin for payment, then sits ruminating, and says to himself*): Old girl's worried. No wonder. Poor little lass. If her mother can't keep shop better she's not likely to be much o' a hand at rearin' a child. She's a poor manager. It passes me why I go on comin' here. (*Puffs at his pipe.*) Happen that's why—it's pity. No one else 'ud stand such shiftlessness. She's her own worst

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enemy. She's one o' those canna be helped on. (*Looks round meditatively and distastefully.*)

[*At this point the door opens, and a decrepit-looking TRAMP, emaciated, ragged, and red-knuckled, comes in. He offers to seat himself at the other table. He looks very tired and cold.*]

WORKMAN: Sit you here, mester. I'm goin'. I'm only waitin' for t' missis to come back. This is t' warmest corner.

TRAMP: Thank you, I will that. (*He sits wearily, coughing.*) It's cold, and this 'ere fog's awful.

WORKMAN: You'll soon warm you here.

TRAMP: Ay, it's long since I were warm, though.

WORKMAN: You're a stranger here, happen, if you take exception to t' weather. We're used to these black fogs. There's an east wind, and t' smoke won't rise.

TRAMP: I've passed through Sheffield many's the time before though—I'm on t' road.

WORKMAN: Ay. (*Politely.*) Well, so might many a one o' us be if things had happen been a little different.

TRAMP: H'm! (*Sits silent.*)

WORKMAN: If you don't know Sheffield then you don't know this 'ere coffee-'ouse—that's why you come in.

TRAMP: I've been in so many coffee-'ouses—and other 'ouses—that I don't know one from other for t' most part. But your knowledge o' this 'ere hasn't kept you out.

WORKMAN: Oh, well, I come in now and again for friendship. I'm sort o' sorry for the missis. She's had a

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rough time, she has. Her mester's dead now, and she mun thank Heaven for that, I know. He'd leave her for months at a time—but that wasn't worst part. When he was at home he fair beat the life out o' her. (*Looking round cautiously.*) But I give you a friendly warning, mester: *don't 'ave nothing she's cooked.* 'Ave bread and cheese or summut to drink. But she canna cook. I've noticed it many's the time, these 'ere miserable-looking down-trod women never can. Whether it's because they've been put upon, or why they've been put upon, passes me. Nothing won't learn 'em. The judgment isn't in them. She's the melancholy kind. (*She enters.*) 'Ere she is. (*Rises.*) Missis, 'ere's my debt. (*Hands it to her.*)

WOMAN: Thank you, mester. You needn't ha' waited for me all this while. I'd ha' trusted you.

WORKMAN: I weren't waiting in particular, missis. I were having a word wi' this mester here.

WOMAN: Ay, so I see. (*Pauses.*) What are you wanting, mester? (*To TRAMP.*)

TRAMP: Gi' us some cocoa. (*He speaks hoarsely, and coughs a good deal.*)

[*The WORKMAN nods approvingly at the TRAMP's discreet order and goes out.*]

WOMAN: You'll have summut wi' it?

TRAMP: Gi' me some bread and cheese. (*He rests his elbows on the table wearily. She takes the food to him.*)

WOMAN: You seem wore out.

TRAMP: I am that. And cold. It's well to be in here. It's well to be in t' warmth, and under cover. It's well to be you, missis.

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WOMAN (*echoing in surprise*): Well to be me? (*Going back to counter.*) There's not many 'ud say that. (*Sits herself, and takes up her patching.*)

TRAMP: Nay; wouldn't they?

WOMAN: Nevertheless, it's true. But no one knows why but me.

TRAMP (*with faint interest*): It's not for the roof that covers you then. Why's the houses on either side empty, missis? And why's one at end pulled down?

WOMAN: Nay, it weren't pulled down, It were i' that there Zeppelin raid; these other 'ouses is all condemned.

TRAMP: And you stay on?

WOMAN: It's my 'ome, mester. There's them lost their 'omes that time. I didn't, thank God. T' papers said, t' Germans has done what we oughter, it's a good job them 'ouses was destroyed. But they 'adn't their 'omes 'ere.

TRAMP: Is it always dark 'ere? It's worse nor November i' Bermondsey.

WOMAN: Not always. Often. It's t' smoke. We don't take no notice on it.

TRAMP: It looks as though the sun never falls.

WOMAN: They say it's because t' city's built on t' clay; though what that's got to do with it passes me.

TRAMP: Yet you can care for t' place?

WOMAN: It's only place I know.—Happen I wouldn't care, but for the one thing. It's my 'ome and my child's 'ome.

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TRAMP: Ah! The chap as went out said as you'd had a hard life. (*Coughs.*) Whose life isn't hard, if he thinks about it. But it's what we ask for, happen—what we make it. And you've got your 'ome as you want.

WOMAN: If life leaves me the one thing, I'll rest content.

TRAMP: It's summut to be able to say that.

[*A CHILD about seven or eight years old runs into the shop. She is fair and delicate in type—pretty.*]

CHILD: Mummy, is t' shop empty? (*She stops on seeing the TRAMP.*)

WOMAN: You didn't ought come in here, Rose Lily. It's not good for you.

ROSE LILY: Let me stay. I love t' shop. It's so warm. It smells so nice. Let me serve t' shop, mummy, for this mester. (*Coaxingly.*) Just for a treat.

WOMAN: Do you like it so much, Rosie?

ROSE LILY: Ay. Let me wait on t' mester. (*Running to him.*) Any more tea, mester?

TRAMP: Ay, my lass. (*Passing her his cup.*) Mek it cocoa, though.

ROSE LILY (*runs to the urn and fills it, happily; bringing the cup back*): I've put sugar in it, too.

TRAMP: You have that; I thank you. Where did you get your pretty name?

ROSE LILY (*shyly*): Mummy gave it me.

WOMAN: Run away and play you, love—run back to t' parlour.

ROSE LILY: Mun I?

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WOMAN: Ay.

ROSE LILY (*disappointedly, to TRAMP*): Good-bye, mester. I'd ha' liked to a-stayed wi' you.

TRAMP: Good-bye, Rose Lily.

[*She half approaches him, then seeing her mother's eye jealously upon her, draws back and goes, slowly.*]

TRAMP: That's a nice little lass—a pretty little lass.

WOMAN: Ay, and she's mine—mine only.

TRAMP: She's the apple o' your eye, seemingly.

WOMAN: She is that. She's all I've got.

TRAMP: I heard tell you weren't so happy wi' her dad.

WOMAN: Her—her?—*He* were never her dad!

TRAMP (*after a pause*): Happen it's a pity I spoke. But I'm on the road. It's not likely you'll see me again. So you needn't mind me.

WOMAN: I shouldn't ha' loved her if she'd been his'n! I should ha' loathed her.

TRAMP: Happen she isn't yourn neither?

WOMAN (*firing up*): She is, she's mine alone. She's nobody else's in t' world.—She was given me—for my comfort—for charity, as you'd give to them as starve. Nobody can't make her owt but mine. She's rewarded me for much.

TRAMP: Who gave you—this 'ere treasure?

WOMAN (*slowly*): Would you like to know, mester? Would you like to know?—I've never been asked that question afore; and I doubt no one would believe me. (*She crosses to him.*) You're on the road, you say. I shan't

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never see you again, happen. (*Seats herself opposite him.*)
I've a mind to tell you.

TRAMP: You won't never see me again, missis.

WOMAN (*calling*): Rose Lily—Rose Lily!

ROSE LILY (*at inner door*): Yes, mother.

WOMAN: Undress yourself for bed. I'll be in with you shortly.

ROSE LILY: You won't really be long, mummy?

WOMAN: Nay, I've said I wouldna.

ROSE LILY: All right, mummy, I'll undress. (*Goes back into room.*)

WOMAN (*settles down, looks into space before her—after a pause*): It were eight years gone, it were, and it were a night like this. (*She pauses again, and looks into the distance.*)

TRAMP (*encouragingly*): Eight years—the gift of Rose Lily.

WOMAN: It were eight years, and I were alone, as often.

TRAMP: Eight years, you say. And he were away?

WOMAN: Eh? Oh, ay; he weren't there. That were usual. And I never complained o' that. But I were alone, and I were afraid. It were dark and cold, like to-day.

TRAMP: You was afraid?

WOMAN: Ay, the night were so cold and dark. The fog fair cut you away fro' the rest o' the world. No customers wasn't comin' in. We've never done more business than just kept us alive.

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TRAMP: No.

WOMAN: I were alone, and a man come in.

TRAMP: Just one man, alone?

WOMAN: Ay.

TRAMP: A tramp-man, happen; as it might ha' been me to-day.

WOMAN: Nay, this were no tramp! He were a stranger, though. On t' road, happen. But not like other tramps. He were—he were beautiful. He might ha' been a kind of a gypsy. He were—he were—like them we dream of in us youth. He were merry and gay—and he hardly looked at me.

TRAMP: And yet, missis——

WOMAN: I waited on 'im. I served 'im best I could. All the while I feared for the moment when he'd be going. He got up at last. He noticed me then; he asked me why I were unhappy. He took pity on me. He stayed.

TRAMP: Pity?—he stayed——

WOMAN: He stayed. He loved me—it were for pity. One night he stayed. One whole night.

TRAMP: And then he went away?

WOMAN: Then he went. But he loved me before he went.

[The TRAMP rises to his feet slowly, limps to the chilly stove, and warms his red, starved hands.]

TRAMP (after a pause): And Rose Lily?

WOMAN: He gave her me as a keepsake from him, for my very own, mester.

[A long pause.]

ON THE ROAD

TRAMP: You bear him no ill-will, missis?

WOMAN: Ill-will! Nay, I couldna. But to speak truth—I'd forgot him—till you asked me o' Rose Lily. I'd not thought o' him since time out o' mind.

TRAMP: Did your mester know this story?

WOMAN: I told him once—when he spoke sharp to Rose Lily!

TRAMP: He'd happen punish you for that, missis?

WOMAN: Nay, he wouldna believe it, he were that scornful o' me. But it checked him, that I durst say it. He'd a strange fancy for Rose Lily. And he didn't think that no one could care for me. He'd only my word for it.—Happen you don't believe it, neither?

TRAMP (*turning heavily away*): Nay, I wunna say. Yet stranger things may happen, missis.

WOMAN: You mun be going?

TRAMP: I mun go. (*He feels in his pocket for his money, in payment.*)

[ROSE LILY *runs in in her nightgown.*]

ROSE LILY: Mummy, why are you so long?

WOMAN (*rising, ignoring her*): Take back the money, mester. We're quits this evening. I were thankful to talk. (*She pushes it back into his hand, goes back to her place at the counter and stands there.*) It'll happen pay your night's lodging.

TRAMP: Thank you, missis.

WOMAN: You're welcome; it's little poor folks can do to help them as needs it.

ON THE ROAD

TRAMP: It comes the kinder for the will, missis.

WOMAN: Ay—happen so.

TRAMP: Good-bye, missis; (*to ROSE LILY*) good-bye, little lass. (*He limps towards the door.*)

WOMAN: Good night, mester. (*She looks through the door which he has opened*). It's a cruel bad night to venture out.

TRAMP: Ay, but I mun be going. (*Goes, with bent head.*)

[*Slowly she follows to the door.*]

WOMAN (*turning to Rose*): It's that thick you canna see your 'and. And full moon to-night, too. Why, we did ought see Phœbe clear to-night, love, if it weren't for t' smoke. I doubt me it'll be light as day now, outside t' city. It's not fit to turn a dog out i' this black fog. (*Closes the door.*) Eh, Rose Lily, but you'll take cold standing there wi' bare feet.

ROSE LILY: I'm quite warm. Mummy, why didn't you take that mester's money? Were you sorry for him? (*Her mother takes her in her arms.*) Why, mummy, you're crying—why?

WOMAN (*leaning her face against the child*): Yes, Rose Lily. Rose Lily—there's them's worse off nor us, isn't there?

ROSE LILY (*in some surprise*): Are we bad off, mummy?

WOMAN: Happen not.

ROSE LILY: That were a very poor man, weren't he?

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WOMAN: Ay, I think so. (*Looking away.*) Yet there were that about him put me i' mind of another—(*turns, sees the child and puts her arms round her, her whole world; and adds, as she sets the thought of him away for good, for why should she trouble over a stranger?*)—I dunna know why.

CURTAIN.

LUCK OF WAR

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

This play was produced at the Kingsway Theatre on May 13th, 1917, by the Pioneer Players, with the following cast :

WORDLEY HULSE	<i>Amos Crispin.</i>
WISH WYNNE	<i>Ann.</i>
FABIA DRAKE	<i>Maud Hemingway.</i>
MADELEINE GRANDE	<i>Neighbour.</i>
A. S. HOMEWOOD	<i>George Hemingway.</i>
AUDREY CAMERON	<i>Victor Hemingway.</i>

Producer : EDITH CRAIG.

CHARACTERS

AMOS CRISPIN.

ANN HEMINGWAY (*married to Amos Crispin*).

MAUD HEMINGWAY.

A NEIGHBOUR (*Woman*).

GEORGE HEMINGWAY, *A Soldier*. (*He has lost a foot.*)

VICTOR HEMINGWAY.

SCENE:—*A kitchen living-room in the Northern Midlands. There are two doors, one, right centre, is the outer door, the one left leads to a bedroom. There is a piano left; on the right wall over the fireplace there hangs a framed memorial card, also a looking-glass. Dresser, centre wall.*

AMOS CRISPIN *is walking about preparing anxiously for some function. He wears his Sunday blacks, his hair is oiled, and he has great trouble with his collar and tie. The collar is linen; the shirt is flannel. It is difficult to make them adhere. ANN, newly married to him, helps him, ties his tie, etc. He is a little restive.*

AMOS (*right, irritably*): Look careful, lass. Ow! Tha's run pin i' me.

ANN: Tha munna be ser fractious. I canna let thee go wi' thee collar all aside. There, that's better. Tha'd better let me gi' thee a broosh down. (*Crosses left for clothes-brush.*)

AMOS: Ay, I suppose I 'ad. It isn't as if I could sit at t' back o' t' hall.

ANN: Noa, thee'll be noaticed. I wouldn't like to 'ave thee all any road.

[MAUD, ANN's child by her first marriage, puts her head in at the outer door, right, then enters.]

MAUD: Can I see 'im, moother?

ANN: Ay, thee can directly. 'E's nearly finished. (*Gives him a few more strokes with the brush.*) There, doesn't 'e look smart?

MAUD: Ay, 'e doos that. Why does 'e?

ANN: It's 'is party, my loove. It's to celebrate 'im.

LUCK OF WAR

AMOS: Look 'ere, Ann, where's my badge? I ought to 'ave it.

ANN: I'll find it yer. (*Runs to room through door, left*). I know just where it is.

MAUD: Is it to celebrate you bein' my new dada?

AMOS: Nay, Maud, this is a meetin' at t' chapel-hall.— Seems like t' owd lad's got into this botherin' stud!

MAUD: What's t' meetin' for?

ANN (*returning with badge of starred occupation*): Don't yer ask ser many questions, Maud. 'E's a wonderful man is your new dada.

MAUD: But for why? I want to know——

ANN: Ay, want may want. Lecars for wantin' to know other folk's business.

MAUD (*coaxingly*): You tell me, Mester Crispin—new dada!

AMOS: You tell 'er, Ann.

ANN: Ay, you'll spoil 'er, like the rest on 'em. Well, if yer want to know, it's a party, to celebrate your new dada's 'aving kept the pledge these eight years. And you ought to be thankful for 'aving such a dada.

AMOS (*complacently*): It's i' honour o' my sobriety.

MAUD (*staring at him*): 'As 'e kep' it that long?

AMOS: Yes, Maud, I 'ave; not that I take the credit mysen.

MAUD: And they're that pleased wi' you they're givin' you a party?

AMOS: A celebration, Maud, to testify——

MAUD: Did you drink afore that?

LUCK OF WAR

ANN: Hush, Maud, no he didna, only a little.

AMOS: No, Maud, I'm thankful to say I were not much tempted—not very much. That is, there's those is tempted worse.

MAUD: I thought it was only them as drank 'oo took the pledge—exceptin' the Band of 'Ope. Nelly Smith's father, 'e drank cruel, and 'e——

ANN: Do shut up, Maudie, there's someone at t' door.

[MAUD runs to the door, right, and opens it. A neighbour woman comes in. ANN is up left.]

WOMAN: I were just down at t' post, Mrs. Crispin, 'aving a word wi' t' missis there, and she gied me this 'ere letter to bring you. She 'adn't 'er Jimmy in. It's addressed "Mrs. Hemingway."

ANN (starts): Gi' it 'ere. Thank you, missis. Doesn't Amos look fine?

WOMAN: Ay, 'e does that. Ye'll be fair makin' 'im proud wi' all that fandykin',* I'm sayin'.

ANN: But 'e's a wonderful man is my 'usband, missis. Eight years 'e's kep' 'is pledge.

WOMAN: Yer don't say!

AMOS: Ay, it is that.

WOMAN: I'm reet glad to hear on't as it can be kept that while. I wish my mester'd tek it. I'll see you later i' t' day. I'm going up to the hall mysen. (*Indicating MAUD.*) Eh, but that lass is the fair marrow o' the owd mester!

ANN: You won't be i' time if you don't 'urry.

WOMAN: I shall. It doesn't take me long to wesh me.—Aren't you goin' to look at t' letter, loove? 'Appen it's fro' yer brother 'Orace i' Indy.

*Fandyking=dressing up, setting out.

LUCK OF WAR

ANN: T' letter 'll keep. I'm throng now gettin' ready for this 'ere party. I dunno 'oo it's from.

WOMAN: I won't 'inder yer then; but yer are close!
(*Goes.*)

ANN: Yes, and I'm like to be close. Amos, look. 'Oo can it be from? Maud, run along out and play yer.

[MAUD lingers. ANN pushes her away.
Be off wi' yer!

[*She goes.*

AMOS: Oppen it and see, can't yer? Someone 'oo 'asn't 'eard the 'appy news, seeing as 'ow 'e owns yer as Mrs. 'Emingway.

ANN: It's not fro' 'Orace. I never 'ave no letters from no one 'ardly.

AMOS: Well, tha's got one now, so make the best on't. Look quick, too, it's time tha were makin' ready.

ANN: You oppen it.

[*She gives it him, as if afraid of it, and he opens it.*

ANN (*guessing wildly*): It's from 'im! 'E's livin'.

AMOS (*slowly, looking at the letter*): Ay—ay—To think o' that!

ANN: I knew what it were at onst. I ought never to 'a believed 'im dead wi' outen I'd seen 'im! Give t' letter 'ere.

AMOS (*after handing it over*): What is it 'e says? 'E'll be 'ere almost any time—when?

ANN (*pointing to letter*): Thursday or Friday. To-day's Thursday. (*She is sitting at table, centre, with the letter before her.*)

LUCK OF WAR

AMOS: I mun go to t' meeting all t' same, Ann.

ANN (*irritably*): O' course tha mun. It's nowt to do wi' thee.

AMOS: It's this, I shall 'ave to quit if it's t' truth.

ANN: If that's all, tha might 'a done it earlier! O' course it's truth. He's written it hissen.

AMOS: Ay, tha's too 'asty, Ann; I'm not sayin' nowt agen thee when I speak o' quittin'. But it's a bit o' a shock like.

ANN: Ay; it's a bit o' a shock.

AMOS: Seems like I'd better clear out on't to-neet.

ANN: Tha can do as tha's a mind. I shan't say nothing neither way. 'E'll 'ave to know tha's been lodgin' 'ere, an' all. And as we're married.

AMOS: Ay; but not to-neet. It 'ud spoil 'is welcome. I could flit down to my sister Lizzie's. She'll happen have room.

ANN: Tha can. Fancy 'im comin' back, an' all!

AMOS: Ay, it's unnatural. An' when we'd made so sure 'e were dead, poor George.

ANN: Ay; we made sure enough!

AMOS: 'E says as 'ow 'e's been i' t' 'ospital, 'ow long is it?

ANN: Two month.

AMOS: And never to 'a let us know till it come to this. We wasna married then.

ANN: George wasna much o' a hand wi' a pen. Happen they made 'im write i' t' 'ospital. Happen he didn't know as we'd heard as he was missing. 'E's never wrote to me,

LUCK OF WAR

not since 'e left England—not much afore. That were what always angered me. I never thought 'e showed much consideration, leaving me with the childer an' all! 'E was one of the first to volunteer. I do blame a man does that when 'e 'as a good 'ome. It wasn't as if they'd 'ad to do it then. All t' neighbours said it semt as I'd not done right by 'im, 'im being so eager. That were not doing right by me! 'E's not even ever seen our Doris; I don't know as 'e knows she's born.

AMOS: Shan't yer be glad to see 'im back?

ANN (*dispassionately, but with an undercurrent of emotion*): Glad—I feel like runnin' away like a whipped dog.

AMOS: That 'ud be a sad home-comin' for George.

[ANN *laughs*.

Tha wunna do it?

ANN: Nay, lad, tha may stake thy word I'm not t' runnin'-away kind.

AMOS (*anxiously*): I'd take down that there card.

[ANN *crosses to the wall, right, where a framed black-edged card hangs*.

ANN: Ay, happen I'd better. (*Reads out.*) "In lovin' memory of George Hemingway, reported missin' after the Battle of Nerve Chapel. For King and Country.

The 'ero's grave we may not know,
But yet his wife and children tell,
As on life's path they weepin' go,
'Ow true and brave that 'ero fell."

LUCK OF WAR

I like that bit o' reading. It seems a pity like to take it down. George would a' liked that. I did miss 'im, an' all, fair chronic.

AMOS: Ay, if only 'e could a' known it when it were true.

ANN: Ay. And it were true once.—Amos!

AMOS: Yes?

ANN: Do you think happen—he'll be wounded bad? Blinded, or owt cruel?

AMOS: 'Ow can I tell, wench? Still, 'e 'as wrote—'e must 'ave 'is sight.

ANN (*in a tone of fear*): I thought 'is writin' looked as 'ow 'e 'adn't.

AMOS (*soothingly*): Tha munna be fanciful.

ANN: 'E says Thursday, 'appen. I wonder will 'e be back to-neet——

AMOS: Nay, lass, I canna tell thee.

ANN: I durstn't face 'im alone. I'm afeared on 'im, Amos—I never meant 'im no wrong!

AMOS: No more did none on us—you're not to blame. It were t' newspaper.

ANN: There might easy be two men wi' t' same name. I were too 'asty.

AMOS: It were his own fault for not writin' if 'e were livin'.

ANN: Ay, it were that.

[*Rattle of a latch.*]

There's t' yard gate, Amos. Go—I canna. I believe it's 'im. (*She makes as though to go to the room left, then stops.*)

LUCK OF WAR

[AMOS goes.]

[ANN leans against the back of a chair and waits
There is more rattling, and voices.]

AMOS (*Off. Cheerily.*): Ay, it's 'im reet enough!

[*They enter noisily. The new-comer is in khaki very much the worse for wear, and has a bandaged leg and crutches. ANN turns to him, they kiss, but awkwardly.*]

GEORGE: I'm whoam again, lass; what's left o' mysen.

ANN: Yes, George, tha's back again—after all this long, long while. Tha's changed, George.

GEORGE: Ay, I've changed. Trenches doesn't leave yer no younger, my wench. Didsta think I should never come again?

ANN (*sobs*): Doan't ask me what I thought.

GEORGE: Didsta think I was dead and gone for ever?

[ANN hides her face.]

T' childer will be grown out o' mind, I reckon. Where is they?

ANN: Out playin' theirselves. I didn't know yer'd be 'ere yet awhile. Yer'd better sit thee down—tha'll be tired, only just out o' t' 'ospital.

GEORGE: I am that. (*She helps him to the chair left of the centre table, and he sits wearily.*)

ANN: And hungry?

GEORGE: That'll do later. 'Asta got some o' the old blue-vinied cheese? I'll 'ave that; but I want a look round first. Tha's a bit changed thysen, lass. So's t' room. Why, is that a pianna I see? 'Ow's thee coom by that?

LUCK OF WAR

ANN: I bowt it, George.

GEORGE: Well they mun 'a done pretty well by thee in 'lowance if thee could buy a pianna. And owd Amos 'ere—my, isn't 'e smart! It's not Whi'suntide nor t' Feast nor nothing. What's oop?

ANN: 'E's just off to a celebration at t' chapel-'all.

GEORGE: Well yer'd think it was to celebrate 'im, wouldn't yer? And 'e's come in to show 'isself off, 'as 'e? —'Oo's burial card is yon? 'Oo's gone? Willie?

ANN (*starts confusedly*): Oh, that——

GEORGE: Yes. 'Oo's is it?

ANN (*desperately*): It's thine, George.

GEORGE: Mine—my word, that is a good 'un.

[AMOS *slinks out*.

ANN: It's God's truth, George.

GEORGE: Oh, it's God's truth, is it? Well, it's devil's lies, I should 'a thought, seeing as I'm here.

ANN: We thought you was dead, we did, though I was to die the next minute!

GEORGE: 'Oo told yer that, my lass?

ANN: It were i' t' paper.

GEORGE: Yer never can depend on them papers.

ANN: It were in large as life, "George Hemingway." And there was a nice few other names along wi' it.

GEORGE: Well, it warn't me.

ANN: Then yer might 'a written! I thought happen as you'd been blown up wi' a boom, and nowt left.

GEORGE: 'Ow was I to know yer was getting stuffed up wi' such fairy-tales?

LUCK OF WAR

ANN: Yer might 'a guessed it if I never 'eard—week in week out. Everybody says if you're missing six months and no news as you're dead. After six months they stop your separation allowance and put you on a pension.

GEORGE: They do, do they? And when do they let you marry again?

ANN: I' t' same time. They say it's pretty sure by that time. Then they pay you £39 down and 'a done—at least they do it that road 'ere.

GEORGE: I think it were time I coom back.

ANN: Ay, I've thought so mysen, George. For owt you knew I might 'a been starving.

GEORGE: I left you to t' country, Ann, as a soldier 'as to do. But if you'd been one o' them blatant brassy-haired hussies I shouldn't 'a done it. I knew tha could look after thysen.

ANN: 'Ow did you know t' country was doing right by me?

GEORGE: It expected me to do right by it. Tha mun leave summut to chance.

ANN: And tha did leave me to chance!

GEORGE: That's it, is it? Tha temper's up now I've come home. That's a nice welcome for a man 'oo's 'ad one foot sent to 'ell before 'im.

ANN: I'm not angry, George.

GEORGE (*appeased*): Then don't thee be'ave as if thee were. (*Pointing to framed card.*) Let's see yon memorandum. It's not every man gets t' chance to see 'is own epitaph, is it?

[ANN *brings it to him.*]

LUCK OF WAR

"In loving memory"—makes you feel a bit chilly down't back, that!—'ere's the 'ymn—"The 'ero's grave we may not know, But yet 'is wife and childer tell, As on life's path they weepin' go," (*here he pauses, pulls out his pocket-handkerchief and blows his nose hard.*) "'Ow true and brave that 'ero fell." I like that. 'Oo—(*Blows his nose again.*) 'Oo made up them lines, Ann?

ANN (*looking away*): It were Amos Crispin, George.

GEORGE: It were? Where is Amos?

ANN: I think 'e's gone out to t' celebration—or 'appen 'e thought 'e was in t' road.

GEORGE: I'll thank 'im 'eartily when I see 'im next. It's a bit o' good readin'. If you'd sent it to me i' t' trenches I should 'a broken down.

[*A child runs in.*]

Oo's that? Why, it's never our Maud, is it?

[*MAUD hesitates, then runs to her mother and points to GEORGE.*]

MAUD: Oo's that strange mester, moother?

ANN (*drawing her to her soothingly*): It's thy dada come home fra the war, Maudie. Thy dada we thought wouldn't never come back no more.

MAUD: My dada's dead. (*Turning to GEORGE.*) My dada's killed. Mester Crispin's my new dada.

ANN (*cries*): Maud, he isna!

MAUD: Yes 'e is, mother, you told me so yoursen! And May Parker, she said, "And not afore it were time."

ANN: Maud, 'ow can you say such things, and your own dada here! Your own dada that was a 'ero back again—and lame, Maud—poor dada. Yer munna talk so.

LUCK OF WAR

MAUD: Well, you told me. Is that ~~dada~~? 'E's only one foot.

ANN: Aren't you glad to see 'im, Maud? Aren't yer going to kiss 'im?

GEORGE (*suddenly*): Send t' child away! Tell the brat to get out o' my sight, before I do 'er an injury.

MAUD (*frightened*): Let me go, moother. I'll go to Victor, he's fightin'. (*She runs out.*)

GEORGE: Now, what's this I 'ear, Ann?

ANN: George, I thought you was dead.

GEORGE (*angrily*): And this is what a man gets for fightin' for 'is 'ome. (*Then, overcome, he bows his head on the table.*)

ANN: George, I wouldn't 'a done it, not for worlds—don't yer believe me?—but there was t' two children when yer left—and then Doris were born and there was three—and you didn't even know—and I were that lonely—I 'ad to fend for them.

GEORGE (*suddenly*): *When* were this 'ere Doris born?

ANN: Just after you'd gone to France, George. I meant to tell you as a surprise—and then you never wrote, and I wouldna. (*He turns away with a look of disgust.*)

She's your own baby, George, and you've never even seen 'er. You mun look at her.

GEORGE: She's not mine. I dunna believe it.

ANN: She is! (*Searches her memory for proof.*) I got separation allowance for her.

GEORGE: That proves nowt.

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ANN: Oh, but it does. They're most cunning, George. They'd not give it wrongfully.

GEORGE: 'Ow'd they know?

ANN: Better than what you know to t' contrary. Ponder on it, George, and dunna it seem likely?

GEORGE: I 'eard nowt on't before I went.

ANN: Tha doesn't tek that much notice. And I 'oped it would go off at first.

GEORGE: You're i' the right o' it, I suppose. I don't seem to 'ave much proof o' nothing—I ought to a kep' a better eye on you.

ANN: So I've been thinking this while back, George. Tha's left me to fend for mysen.

GEORGE: That warn't no reason why thee should fix on Amos, before I were cold i' t' earth, so to speak.

ANN: I were just broodin' on thee death, George, that made me feel so lonely-like. When I thought thee was livin' I could 'a hated all husbands, for the way tha'd treated me and left me an' all—but when tha were dead it were different. I felt sorry for thee then, George. I remembered thee qualities, and that I 'adn't always done as a wife should. And thinking o' thee I felt softened to all t' world—I felt sorry for Amos then; and I took 'im out o' kindness, believe me or not, and because I were lonely and miserable and 'e were a good-livin' man.

GEORGE: As thee an' he been to church, may I make so bold to ask?

ANN: Just this day three-week. There wasn't no difficulty. Parson says when a man's been missing that long you can make sure 'e's gone—and it were time.

LUCK OF WAR

GEORGE: Did the parson know as it were time?

ANN: O' course. That's why he done it.

GEORGE: Seems like thee's lost and shameless.

ANN: I'm not goin' to 'ave it for pleasure.

GEORGE: I'll kill that there Amos!

ANN: It warn't 'is fault, George. It were kind on 'im. 'E'd 'a cared for thee three little childer better than thou's done.

GEORGE: It were mean interference wi' an absent man's 'ome.

ANN: Tha munna touch 'im. It's 'is child I'm going to 'ave now.

GEORGE: I won't 'ave 'is child in my 'ouse.

ANN: Then you'll have to turn out your own wife.

GEORGE: Thee's not my wife—thee's 'is fancy woman!

ANN: But I'm married to 'im. (*Bowing her head on her hands.*) Oh, I dunna know what I am!

GEORGE: Tha might 'a had t' patience to 'a waited a year or two for me.

ANN (*looking up, trying to make her reasons clear*): I'd 'a waited a lifetime if I'd 'a known. But I thought happen I'd better have 'im while I'd chance. It's 'ard on a woman not to 'ave no 'usband, and what's use o' waitin' till I'm tired o' thought on't? Happen old age 'ud come on me before my mind's made up, that road. I didn't like thoughts altogether, but I didn't humour mysen. I were tryin' to act for t' best. I even asked about it in my prayers, so 'ow can it be ser wrong?

LUCK OF WAR

GEORGE: What dosta mean? I can't get ho'd o' t' tale. I gather thee comforted thysen pretty smart, and it were Amos were thee fancy.

ANN: It were a case o' then or never, I tell thee—I doan't know what it were I did it for altogether—but I were tryin' to do right.

GEORGE: Well, 'asta gained owt by it?

ANN: Noa; I 'avena.

GEORGE: I'm glad tha admits it. It were t' moon, 'appen, as tha wanted.

ANN: 'Appen it were. Anyway seems like it'll be t' moon for me. For I'd part wi' 'im willingly if it could be undone.

GEORGE: Tha's just stalled wi' discontent, any road.

ANN (*hotly*): Ay, I am that. And why shouldn't I be? There's plenty 'll blame me, but 'oo made all this trouble? I 'aven't meant to do no wrong. I can't 'elp t' way the world's made and t' way I'm made mysen. You can't do more nor try to do right, no matter what folks say. Let them judge theirsens! 'Ow could I foresee then what's to 'appen i' t' future? I thought thee were dead. I took no thoughts for t' morrow—as tha's told me often enough were wisdom! Supposing now tha had been dead, I should 'a been i' t' right on't, both for Amos and t' childer. Yet it's better thee should be livin' nor dead, though it puts me i' t' wrong! It's beyond me, and I leave it to God 'oo invented it—if 'E did.

GEORGE: Thee's too dissatisfied altogether, wench. I doubt that's t' trouble. Tha were tired on me. Well, I reckon I were to blame for some o' it. Tha wished me

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out o' t' road happen—i' t' forefront o' t' battle, same as Uriah.

ANN: I never wish death to no man. I've seen it too often for that. And thee—thee's my husband, George, when all's said and done.

GEORGE: So were Amos!

ANN: Yer can't 'ave two 'usbands.

GEORGE: Tha seems to 'a managed it; or so near's to make no matter.

ANN: It warn't for long.

GEORGE: But tha can't always be chopping and changin'.

ANN: If we munna change there's little 'ope o' improvin' matters i' this world, I'm thinkin'. We should 'ave to go on doin' t' same thing all us lives. And now I mun change back, and make t' best on't.

GEORGE: But 'asta really changed? Is it all ower now?

ANN: I canna say that; it will be by Christmas, all bein' well.

GEORGE: Ay, I'd forgot that. I won't 'ave it i' my 'ouse, I tell you; it mun go away.

ANN: I won't give up no child o' mine.

GEORGE: Tha said tha didna want it, blast yer.

ANN: No more do I. But I shall. That's what's so cruel. It's not the things yer hate that trouble yer. It's the things yer love, and that want yer, even if they don't know it. That's where women's so different fro' men. You don't stand need 'ave owt but t' pleasure o' things.

GEORGE: I've 'ad a bit more nor pleasure sin' I left thee, lass.

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ANN (*going up to him and putting her hand on his shoulder*): Ay; and 'appen it'll draw us together, George. (*There is a pause, for both are softened; then he draws her down and kisses her. Long pause.*)

[*There is a knock at the door.*]

AMOS (*opens door and puts his head in*): Are yer aw reet, Ann?

ANN (*starts*): Reet enough. (*Signs him back.*) Tha munna coom in, it's untimely.

AMOS: Can I 'ave my clothes, Ann?

ANN (*irritably*): Whatten clothes?

AMOS (*opening door wide, and displaying himself*): My work-clothes. I canna go to work i' t' morning like this 'ere.

ANN: They're on't t' chair i' t' room. (*Indicates bedroom.*)

GEORGE: 'Oo's that, Ann? Is it Amos come gallivantin' back?

ANN: Ay, it's Amos Crispin.

GEORGE: Bid 'im coom in.

AMOS (*coming just inside*): I'd rayther not, George, I thank you. I'll say good-neet to you, and be off to my sister Lizzie's. She'll be expectin' of me.

GEORGE (*grimly*): I'll wager it won't be t' first time she's missed thee.

AMOS (*coming down*): No, George, an' it won't. I reckon you've heard tale.

GEORGE: I 'ave that.

AMOS: Seems like it makes me look foolish.

LUCK OF WAR

GEORGE: I 'adn't thought o' it i' that light—but happen it doos, a little.

AMOS: I 'adn't no idea on't, George, as you was livin'.

GEORGE: If I thought as 'ow you 'ad, Amos, you wouldn't be safe standing there, crippled as I may be. You don't stand need tell me that. And I'm not afraid o' any man. She's coom back to me, and glad. You're happen what the world'll come to when such as me's killed off. But not yet awhile.

AMOS: 'Appen not, George. And I wouldna wish it. Why should I wish to come between man and wife?

GEORGE: There's plenty does; but I believe thee, not thee.

AMOS (*anxiously*): There's t' childer outside cryin' for their teas, Ann.

ANN: I've 'ad no time to coddle t' childer. (*They are at door, right. She calls to them.*) Come in, then.

MAUD (*comes in, taking Amos's hand*): Dada'll get us us tea; this dada. I like 'im best.

VICTOR: I 'avena seen more nor one—oh, is that 'im?

ANN: Ay, Victor, that's your real dada come back again.

VICTOR: I like 'im. 'E's only got 'alf a leg. (*Runs up to George's chair.*) You may 'ave Mester Crispin, Maud.

ANN: That's wrong, Victor. Mester Crispin were always kind to thee.

VICTOR: Ay, kind; but not ser nice. (*Fingers George's uniform and the blue hospital-band on sleeve.*)

ANN: Tha must forgive 'im, Amos. Childer 'ave short memories.

LUCK OF WAR

AMOS: It's natur, Ann. I owe 'im no grudge. (*He sets about getting the tea-things.*)

VICTOR (*to GEORGE*): We've got a gramophone, dada!

GEORGE: 'Ow'd yer get that, sonny?

VICTOR: My māmma bought it out o' 'er money down, when she married my new dada.

MAUD (*briskly*): And we've a sewing machine,—dada.

GEORGE: Seems to me that little mistake 'as 'ad it's bright side for t' childer.

ANN: Will they fetch 'em back, George?

GEORGE: What 'ud war-office do wi' 'em? I should think they'd owe me more'n a gramophone. But it's a queer world. I'm thinkin' there's no accountin' for troubles, Ann and Amos. No morena for wars. They come on yer just when you thought you was free of them.

AMOS: Ay, just to learn us 'ow little we know o' the workin's o' providence.

ANN: Happen. Well, I'm not goin' to say thank you for 'em.

AMOS: Happen things you want wouldn't always be good for you.

ANN (*who is also preparing tea, practically*): I don't believe i' that. The things I want is good for everyone. People is 'appiest 'oo's got them. (*This is matter-of-fact, not complaining.*) I don't believe i' being 'urt o' purpose.

GEORGE: Thee always was at outs wi' thee fortune. Now, seems to me these 'ere troubles come just to tell you 'ow well you can do wi'out them things as you've lived for—and 'ow you can live for things as you've

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never wanted afore—just to get us out of us 'abits, so to speak. Look 'ow we change. Th' owd people seem content wi' things they've never fancied when young—and it's just the same wi' t' trenches—even 'ospital isn't so bad. There's things compensates for all us trouble.

ANN: What things? I never heard tell on them. Age brings nowt but experiences, and much you get out o' that, for it comes too late to be o' any use.

GEORGE (*reflectively*): I've even thought as there may be things as compensates in 'ell, if we know 'ow to make t' best on it.

ANN: Tha munna say things like that before t' childer! 'Ell!

GEORGE: Why not? Childer's got to 'ear there's an 'ell, and to learn for theirsens some day; but if we can learn 'em a bit too so much the better, I say.

AMOS: Warn't yer afraid o' bein' killed i' t' trenches, George, i' state o' your soul?

GEORGE: No, I can't say as I thought much about it. There's plenty dies in all states, and I shouldn't fancy goin' anywhere where other poor chaps 'as to be kep' out, even be they Germans. We've all got to die onst, and happen it's simplest i' war; it's better to die for summut than for nowt—and for livin'—well, you see life there. There's Colonials fro' Guineapege, Frenchies and all; and the shells burstin' o' night-time—they is a pretty sight. Like fireworks, Maudie, only better. You don't realise no danger.

VICTOR: And did yer baynit the Germans, dada?

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GEORGE (*his eyes darkening tensely*): Ay. It canna be 'elped.

VICTOR: But don't yer want?

GEORGE: Want? Yer durstn't think. Yer do it swift, one after another, or you don't come 'ome. There was one 'e said, i' English, "Don't yer do it!" But it were too late. I said, "I've done it, mate." And so I 'ad.

AMOS: And tha wasna frettened?

GEORGE: Not me, not to speak on. Some on 'em was, but they don't fight no worse than us others. Seems like you never can say 'oo'll fight well till you try. I reckon you'll 'ave a passive conscience, Amos; but happen you'd get over it under fire. And some o' the bravest on us makes most fuss i' t' 'ospital.

ANN: Was yer well tret i' t' 'ospital?

GEORGE: I was that.

MAUD: Did they 'urt you?

GEORGE: Ay, soom. But they thought I was going. Twicet they laid me out, washed me an' all. Ay, I've seen summut I 'ave, since last I sat i' this 'ere chair; and if it warn't for the loss o' my limb I should leave thee yet again, Ann.

ANN: Then happen there's good in all things.

GEORGE: That's just what I were tellin' thee. And I ought to be thankin' God I'm 'ere at all, for as near as not I 'ad my 'ead blown off.

ANN: George!

MAUD (*shrilly*): Where's the bodies o' they angels as 'as only 'eads? Would you 'a been like them, dada?

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ANN: You're excitin' 'er too much, George. I'll put 'em to bed.

MAUD: But it's at school, moother. There's a picture on 'em wi' nowt but 'eads and wings.

ANN: 'Ush, Maud. You mun go. You've finished your teas.

VICTOR: Let dada tell us summut first!

MAUD: Ay, dada. Tell us a story.

GEORGE: I'll tell you stories and to spare, childer, but not to-neet; stories o' trenches and guns and entanglements—and soldiers, all sorts on 'em—Goorkhas—you'd think they was the dwarfies come again! But go thi ways to bed now, like good childer, as your mother bids you. We'll 'ave plenty o' time to-morrow.

[The children are hustled out. ANN goes with them.]

I've been a long way, Amos, but not quite so far as yon little card sent me. And we'll let bygones be bygones. We'll 'ave a smoke together, Amos, as we was wont. I've looked forrad to a smoke i' my own 'ome through many a long day. (*ANN re-enters with a heap of Amos's clothes.*) But, Ann, I've not seen that there Doris you spoke of. Can't you fetch 'er in?

ANN (*laying down the clothes*): It 'ud happen wake her. You shall see 'em all when t' other childer's i' bed.

GEORGE: Ay, 'appen that's better.

[ANN goes into bedroom to children.]

Shake 'ands wi' me, Amos. (*He struggles on to his crutches.*) We'll 'ave no grudges and grievances in the 'ome-comin'. (*They take each other's hand.*) You can't

LUCK OF WAR

spend the 'ole of your bloody time 'atin' your enemies.
Bygones *is* bygones now.

AMOS: Ay, George. You're a wonderful man!

[They stand clasping hands.]

GEORGE (*complacently*): Ay, Amos.

ANN (*at bedroom-door*): Coom in, George; but dunna make a noise.

[GEORGE slowly limps to bedroom. Amos looks after him, then crosses and picks up his bundle of clothes.]

AMOS: I'd best be off to my sister Lizzie's now, or happen she'll gi' me a bit o' her toong!

CURTAIN.

A PEAKLAND WAKES

Broadcast from Cardiff (5 WA), July 24th, 1924

KATE SAWLE	<i>Old Woman.</i>
EDITH LESTER JONES	<i>Nellie.</i>
—	<i>Maggie.</i>
MABEL TAIT	<i>Mrs. Barlow.</i>
DAVID THORNTON	<i>Nellie's Father.</i>
BETTY MILES	<i>Child (Rhoda).</i>
BRONWEN DAVIES	<i>Child's Mother.</i>

Produced by E. R. APPLETON.

"—— lo, from the stream eternal of Achéron they have brought back
to thee Adonis . . .

Here are built for him shadowy bowers of green . . .

Be gracious now, dear Adonis, and propitious even in the coming
year.

Dear to us has thine advent been, Adonis, and dear shall it be
when thou comest again."

CHARACTERS

OLD WOMAN.

NELLIE.

MRS. BARLOW.

MAGGIE.

CROWD.

NELLIE'S FATHER.

CHILD (RHODA).

CHILD'S MOTHER.

LAME SOLDIER.

DANCERS.

An open space in the street. People have collected to see the morris dancing. The processional dance will pass this way : indeed it will pass most ways in the tiny town. While they wait the girls dance. They sing the dance music for themselves, or a singing-game with children and girls may be played. Men and boys are away forming up for the processional in which women may not join. The houses are limestone, old, severe. The land behind them rises so that the backs stand at least a storey higher than the fronts, where the shops are. This can be simplified, but the general effect in a limestone country is ghostliness of atmosphere ; whiteness. The rising land is grass-grown, divided horizontally and perpendicularly with white stone walls, built at what seems to be an impossible angle. But it isn't ; they are mortarless, and yet they endure, and have endured for centuries. There is perhaps one wind-clipped tall beech, and a few bushes. The light is clean and cold and silvery. The houses look thick-walled, and are a home-made mountain version of Jacobean ; small-windowed, because it is thought more necessary to provide against winter cold than summer heat. The thin, hardy women mostly wear flannel shawls round their shoulders, except the young ones, who even here wear white, and coloured ribbons, for this is mid-summer. The children have had their hair tightly plaited or twisted up in rags for a week to prepare for the great day, and now all are crimps and curls ; the men, more limited in their means of expression, wear coloured silk neck handkerchiefs of blues and purples, the best that Norwich or Spitalfields can produce. There are merry-go-rounds and booths near at hand, but for the moment their discordant music

A PEAKLAND WAKES

is hushed : the morris is a-foot. Up left stands a war-shrine, decorated with flowers and flags. The year is 1919.

The curtain rises on the girls' and children's dancing or playing.

AN OLD WOMAN: Be still with your singing, lasses, and your dancing too.—It's bad enough that we mun have the morris. They're rightly called guisers* this year, I'm thinking, gaffers like them; there's scarce a lad left.—Have shame on you, keepin' wakes† as if there hadn't never been no war!

A YOUNG GIRL: It's long enough since we had chance of keeping wakes. I can't hardly remember them. We canna go on mourning for ever. Why, some o' those who went to t' war I've very near forgotten too!

OLD WOMAN: You haven't got no hearts!

THE GIRL: It's not us hearts, missis, it's us memories. We were some on us childer. We've never known owt but war, since we were old enough to consider.

OLD WOMAN: They've stopped wakes for five years, and I don't see that they stand need to go on with it again. It only makes us think o' them it troubles us to think on.

A CHILD: Granny, I can't remember morris at all—I want to see it! I wish it 'ud be quick!

* Mummers are called *guisers* (as dis-guise). A person who is peculiar to look at is described as an "old guiser."

† The word *wakes* may be used either as singular or plural.

A PEAKLAND WAKES

OLD WOMAN: They might have left it till I were gone.

ANOTHER WOMAN: You mustn't talk like that, missis. Young folk mun have it—and you'll be here many a long year yet.

OLD WOMAN: Happen I will, happen I won't; but them what ought to be dancing won't never be here no more.

AN ELDERLY MAN: You're right i' that, missis. There were my Horace—he were the most promising of all the lads this time five years a-back. He'd have been among the men now—but he wean't never come back fro' France.

HIS DAUGHTER (*the girl who spoke before*): But I want to see it, dada. You can't stop everything, chance who's dead; you can't and you didn't ought.

OLD WOMAN: It's all right for you young ones—you think o' nowt but the time as is.

GIRL: The time as is isn't much here i' t' Peäk. I want to go to Manchester, I do.

OLD WOMAN: T' Peäk's been enough for me, year in year out, for five and sixty year.

GIRL: Tastes differs. You don't see nowt here. I shan't stay here all my life. Nowt ever comes here but t' Feast and Michaelmas. In Manchester there's summut every day.

OLD WOMAN: You never know where you'll stay. Fortune keeps some i' one place some i' another. It kept me i' Huckwell, and I've seen as much as most.

GIRL: I shall marry someone and go away. I know. Shan't you, Maggie?

A PEAKLAND WAKES

MAGGIE (*another girl*): Ay, I shall that.

MRS. BARLOW (*the woman who spoke before*): I wonder time and again where the lads 'll be the young lasses will marry!

THE GIRL (*tossing her head*): There's plenty left for some on us!

THE MAN: They're lying in France, missis—best part o' them—in France wi' my Horace!

HIS DAUGHTER: It's no good thinking o' them. I think it's a shame lasses can't dance i' t' morris. It's as bad as Castleton, wi' a man for a May King! If they're short o' lads they should let t' lasses do it. It's much more fun than watchin'.

THE MAN: Eh, it was settled before any o' us were born. It's old custom, Nellie. You munna go again it.

NELLIE: You'd go again if it suited you! I'm sick o' watchin' other folk have t' fun.

THE MAN: Lasses is better out of it; you don't want wakes to be as bad as 'lowsin'* day. Why, it's a heathen dance, they say!

NELLIE: If lads can be heathens, why canna we? I know I could dance it every bit as well. (*Dances a few steps.*)

THE MAN: Nay, I dunna know why. I have heard tell it once were fire-worship. Happen it were too dangerous for lasses to play wi' fire.

OLD WOMAN (*bitterly*): Us lads seemed born to play wi' it, whether or no. Heavy fire, theirs were, not sport like thissen.

* Easter Monday.

A PEAKLAND WAKES

THE MAN: Ay. I've thought o' them each wakes-night—night as wakes was due, that is—nights that would ha' been wakes i' peace-time! I've thought o' them all these years back! I've thought "It's not *playin'* this time, Horace—it's grim earnest." He liked wakes, he did! Yet happen he wouldna ha' cared for it again, all this play-actin', after the reality, who knows?

MRS. BARLOW: Fightin' seems to come natural to lads fro' babyhood. Happen it's providential. Happen it's what they're for.

THE OLD WOMAN: It doesn't seem right to be merry-makin' wi'out all o' them!

MRS. BARLOW: T' rector said they should carry cross i' t' dance where our lads would ha' walked.

OLD WOMAN: What's t' cross to do wi' t' morris?—or wi' our lads?

MRS. BARLOW: Nay, I always think it is a kind o' guisin' when they carry it i' church, mysen! But I like it well enough.

OLD WOMAN: They'd no chance o' Christian burial. It would ha' been more seemly if they'd carried a coffin, I'm thinking.

MRS. BARLOW (*shuddering*): Nay, you munna say that!

OLD WOMAN: I don't hold wi' any of it.

THE MAN: It means as it's summer come again. They might ha' carried boughs and flowers i' t' dance i' memory o' us boys.

A PEAKLAND WAKES

MRS. BARLOW: They'll leave a empty space I were told, and t' guisers 'll stand by t' board yonder and look at names, and think o' them as is gone.

OLD WOMAN: Much good that'll do them. It's poor comfort that—to have your name read over in a list o' the dead! It's a poor feast-day when you're only up on t' board!

MAGGIE: But you munna talk is if it hurt them. You spoil us pleasure too. They dunna know.

OLD WOMAN (*drawing her shawl round herself*): My lass, that's what troubles me.

MAGGIE: You make us remember when we'd rather forget. I wish Harry Hearnshaw'd come back, I do!

OLD WOMAN: You canna wish it as I wish for my sons.

CHILD (*clapping her hands*): Mámma, they're coming, they're coming. I hear t' music. It's yonder! See!

OLD WOMAN (*putting her hands over her ears*): Ay, you canna get away from it, chance which street you stand in.

THE CHILD'S MOTHER (*listening*): Ay, that's morris, that's morris. Climb up here, Rhoda, and see. You've never seen it afore since you remember. That's right, mester, hold up t' little 'un. Childer likes t' morris! There is the little boys, Rhoda—and the old mesters—dunna they look funny sweepin' wi' t' besoms? (*Turning to MRS. BARLOW.*) I'm thinking there'll be no young men at all, for Jim Bracegirdle's lame and Fred Earp's not right in his mind again.

[*The processional dance approaches, left. There are boys and old men sweeping round themselves with*

A PEAKLAND WAKES

heather brooms. One man is dressed in woman's clothes (bonnet, shawl, and skirt) and has a blacked face, and carries a broom.

THE MAN: Eh, they're a poor lot to what they were, they are!

[The dancers are accompanied by one or two on-lookers, who try to keep up with them—among them a man with a crutch who breathlessly flings himself on the ground.]

LAME MAN: Eh, I can't go no further. That's what t' war's done for me!

[After the old men with brooms the little boys come. As they pass the shrine the dancers pause and salute. The music is the Winster processional. It is a solemn dance.]

CHILD'S MOTHER: See them, missis!

[They dance a short figure, which forms a pause in the processional.]

OLD WOMAN: I dunna want to see 'em. *(Covers her face.)*

MRS. BARLOW *(drying her eyes)*: Eh, but you mun see!

NELLIE: They look fine.

[More men dance on, and pause.]

There's one on 'em forgot to salute. He's a stranger!

MAGGIE: There's another—and another! Why, 'e doos look nice—why, it's—

[At this point a group of young men have followed on—none of them turn to the shrine—they all face down stage and dance a geometrical figure, much

A PEAKLAND WAKES

longer than the figure danced by the others, with dispassionate accuracy, looking straight before them, holding wands in their hands, which the leader holds up when the figure is finished, and the wands are woven into a star.

OLD WOMAN (suddenly): It's John!

[All the onlookers crane forward. They are in groups left and right, some crouching to let others have a view. The dancers are radiantly athletic, all in white and green, and with coloured ribands, and garlanded; they dance brilliantly. The dance figures each end with the straight boughs which they carry being twined into a star, as in the *Winster sword dance*. The dance, which is very intricate, and which lasts some minutes, has several figures. It being finished they smoothly take up the processional and pass out, right. At this point the *Morris King* should follow riding on a white horse—absolutely covered with flowers. The music grows faint. The little crowd stands rapt, swaying slightly to the rhythm of the dance in an attitude of watching. After a moment, when the procession has gone, they speak, almost simultaneously.]

MRS. BARLOW: *He* were there!

THE CRIPPLED SOLDIER: Them was my mates!

THE MAN: That were my Horace!

THE CHILD'S MOTHER: Did you see your daddy, Rhoda?

OLD WOMAN: It's my boys!

A PEAKLAND WAKES

MAGGIE (*brightly*): Why, there were Harry! See! He give me this! (*She has a posy in her hand.*)

[*They have all turned, seizing each other by the arm for sympathy, then they slowly loosen grip. Their faces fade, except the children's. Each says "Why, I thought it were——" then they look a little ashamed.*]

THE CHILD (*smiling*): Mámma, I did see my daddy. (*A pause.*)

MRS. BARLOW (*recovering herself*): What was it, mester? You saw——

THE ELDERLY MAN: Ay, I thought I saw them all—yet they wasn't here this year. (*He pauses.*) Think you, Mary Barlow, as how the morris is haunted?

NELLIE (*whimpering*): I'm freetened!

MRS. BARLOW: I wouldn't be past thinking so.

THE CHILD: It was lovely, mother. When will it come again?

THE MOTHER: It wunna come back at all. That is—not for another year, loove. Not till the summer comes again. We'll have to wait through t' back-end, and through t' winter—winter and the snow flying——

CHILD: That's a long while. But it *will* come back.

THE MOTHER: It'll come at t' feast, I promise you.

CHILD: Then I'll have to wait for that.

THE MAN: You and Maggie can go and dance i' t' croft now, Nellie.

NELLIE: I don't want now.

MRS. BARLOW: Mester, what does the morris mean?

A PEAKLAND WAKES

THE MAN: Many years ago when I danced in it, before I had my gammy leg, I were told by old Curtis—him as carved the oak i' church—that it meant that men always goes on living on earth, as the seasons come, as sure as Midsummer—that it were a sort o' a prayer that as he has lived, so he may; that the earth may bring forth her increase, same as they sing.—We should be badly put to it if she didna!

MRS. BARLOW: But you can't bring back the same men! That's what we'd have, but it's against nature. And no prayer alters that.

MAN: You canna bring back the same summer, missis. Yet the sun falls at last, and the summer does come back.

OLD WOMAN: That's scant comfort to them as remembers summers as was different.

MAGGIE: Happen it means we mun all be as happy as we can i' the summer that's here.

MAN: Happen that may be, my lass. I lost more lambs that I reared in the spring snows—but I've wellnigh forgot it. Summer's summer.

NELLIE (*whispering to Maggie*): I saw them too, and I wish as I hadna! Dunna keep yon token, Maggie!

[*A pause.*]

MAGGIE: I like it. It smells sweet. Happen one o' the children dropped it. (*She has already forgotten where it came from.*)

OLD WOMAN (*slowly getting up*): I shall come again to next morris, I shall—if I'm spared.

[*She goes away. Music of merry-go-round begins in the distance.*]

A PEAKLAND WAKES

MOTHER OF CHILD: Come, Rhoda, don't you want to go on t' merry-go-round?

CHILD: Ay.

[*They go.*]

MAGGIE: It's dancing time for us too now. Let's begin.

[*All dance a country dance. When they begin the merry-go-round music must fade away. A fiddler should play the tune.*]

The music of the Winster Morris may be found in the Morris Books, vols. 2 and 3, by Cecil J. Sharp and Herbert MacIlwaine. (Novello & Co.)

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